

VZCZCXRO6937

PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHBC RUEHDA RUEHDE RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIHL RUEHIK  
RUEHKUK RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHLN RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK  
RUEHYG

DE RUEHIT #0377 1960758

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

P 140758Z JUL 08 ZUI ZDK RUEHSD 0069 1970440

FM AMCONSUL ISTANBUL

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8318

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC

RHMCSUU/FAA NATIONAL HQ WASHINGTON DC

RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

RUEPGAB/MNF-I C2X BAGHDAD IZ

RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC

UNCLAS ISTANBUL 000377

C O R R E C T E D COPY - ADDING SENSITIVE CAPTION

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAIR](#) [ECON](#) [IZ](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: COORDINATION PROBLEMS HAMPER DIRECT FLIGHTS  
BETWEEN ISTANBUL AND ERBIL

¶1. (SBU) Privately owned Turkish airline Atlasjet on June 29 started regularly scheduled commercial direct flights between Istanbul and Erbil in Northern Iraq. According to CEO Orhan Coskun, Atlasjet will run five flights per week, transporting roughly 3,000 passengers monthly. Coskun and Director for Flight Operations Ahmet Ata, however, complained to us that poor coordination between Atlasjet and the Iraqi Civilian Aviation Authority (ICAA) caused a delay on at least one of their flights. Ata provided us an email from July 3 where the ICAA blamed a computer problem at the U.S. Air Force control in Kirkuk (RAM CC) for a delay in flight authorization. Coskun said using ICAA as a go-between was cumbersome and he requested a direct point of contact to both RAM CC and Erbil Control. Ata also requested greater advance authorization notice for their weekly flight plan. Currently, Atlasjet only receives 24 hour notice before each flight, according to Ata. Both Coskun and Ata understood the difficult situation in Iraq, but they requested better coordination to avoid unnecessary problems.

¶2. (SBU) Both Coskun and Ata expressed optimism about the airline's new routes. Atlasjet is primarily a domestic carrier and, before the flights to Erbil, the airline's only international flights were charter. Ata was pleased with the number of passengers so far. He told us the planes were nearly full, and the volume about the same in each direction. If all goes well, Coskun said, the airline will add an additional flight per week by September. According to Coskun, Atlasjet could later provide direct flights to Erbil from other Turkish cities, such as Antalya. Coskun also said, however, flights from Istanbul to Baghdad are not commercially viable due to security concerns.

¶3. (U) Ata was pleasantly surprised with the security and facilities at Erbil, when he visited the city in preparation for the new route. Ata found Erbil to be a growing city with great market potential for international flights. Ata was encouraged by the number of people in Erbil who spoke Turkish. Because of the widespread use of Turkish, Kurdish was not a necessary language for the flight attendants.

¶4. (U) Past Turkish commercial ventures for direct flights between Istanbul and Northern Iraq have failed. Regional Turkish airline Fly Air started limited service to Erbil and

Sulaymaniyah in 2005, but the airline terminated these flights less than one year later when the lease ended on its two aircraft dedicated for this route. There are several airlines operating out of Erbil with Austrian Air flying between Vienna-Erbil five times a week and Royal Jordanian has six flights a week between Amman-Erbil. Also, a Kurdish carrier -- Laveen Air, part of the Zagros Group -- flies to Istanbul three times a week.

IENER